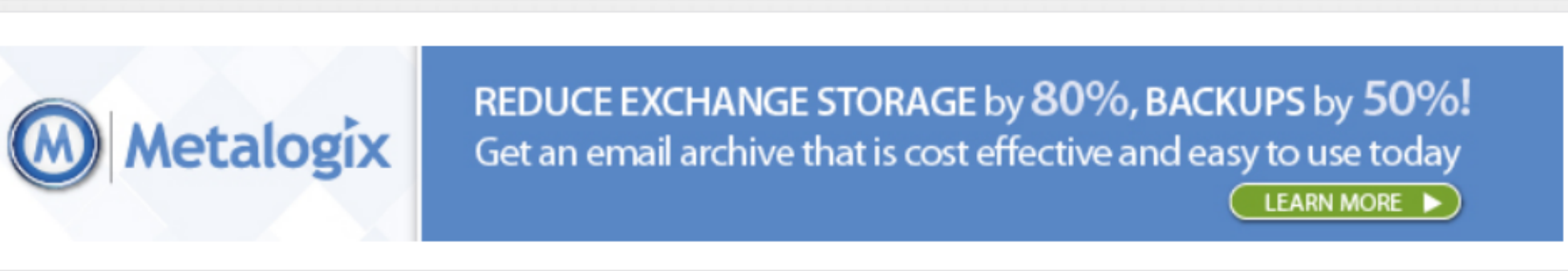
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Product Review: Stellar Mailbox Exchange Toolkit

by Steve Goodman [Published on 29 April 2015 / Last Updated on 29 April 2015] g+ profile

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This article reviews Stellar Mailbox Exchange Toolkit.

Product: Stellar Mailbox Exchange Toolkit

Product Homepage: click here

MSExchange.org Silver Award ★★★

Introduction

A failed Exchange database, the inability to restore from backups or being tasked with recovering data from an old OST file on a departed employee's laptop. All are nightmare scenarios for an Exchange administrator and if a tool hasn't already been purchased, could easily result in searching the Internet for solutions and then trying two or three until a working, suitable tool has been found – often at great expense.

Stellar Data Recovery have packaged up a number of tools in their Exchange recovery portfolio and provide them as a bundle or individually. Given the large discount on the whole suite when bought up-front it's fair to assume that most purchases of the individual tools are in response to an emergency, so at face value it seems to make a lot of sense to buy the toolkit up-front in case it is ever needed.

The tools included in the Exchange Toolkit and reviewed here are as follows.

- Stellar Phoenix Exchange Recovery
- Stellar Mailbox Extractor for Exchange
- Stellar OST to PST Converter
- Stellar Exchange BKF Recovery

Some of these tools will work well together – like the Exchange BKF Recovery followed by the Mailbox Extractor, whilst the OST to PST converter sits slightly apart with a focus on client-side recovery from Outlook offline cache files. We'll look at each product individually and then give an overall rating on how they stand together as a toolkit. But for those in a hurry, because perhaps you've got a broken Mailbox Database that needs fixing; yes – the tools work!

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Stellar Phoenix Exchange Recovery

The primary purpose of Stellar Phoenix Exchange Recovery is to allow data to be extracted from a damaged Exchange Database.

You might need this because a disk filled up and the database stopped unexpectedly, log files were accidentally deleted or the underlying storage suffered corruption and no other copy exists of the data.

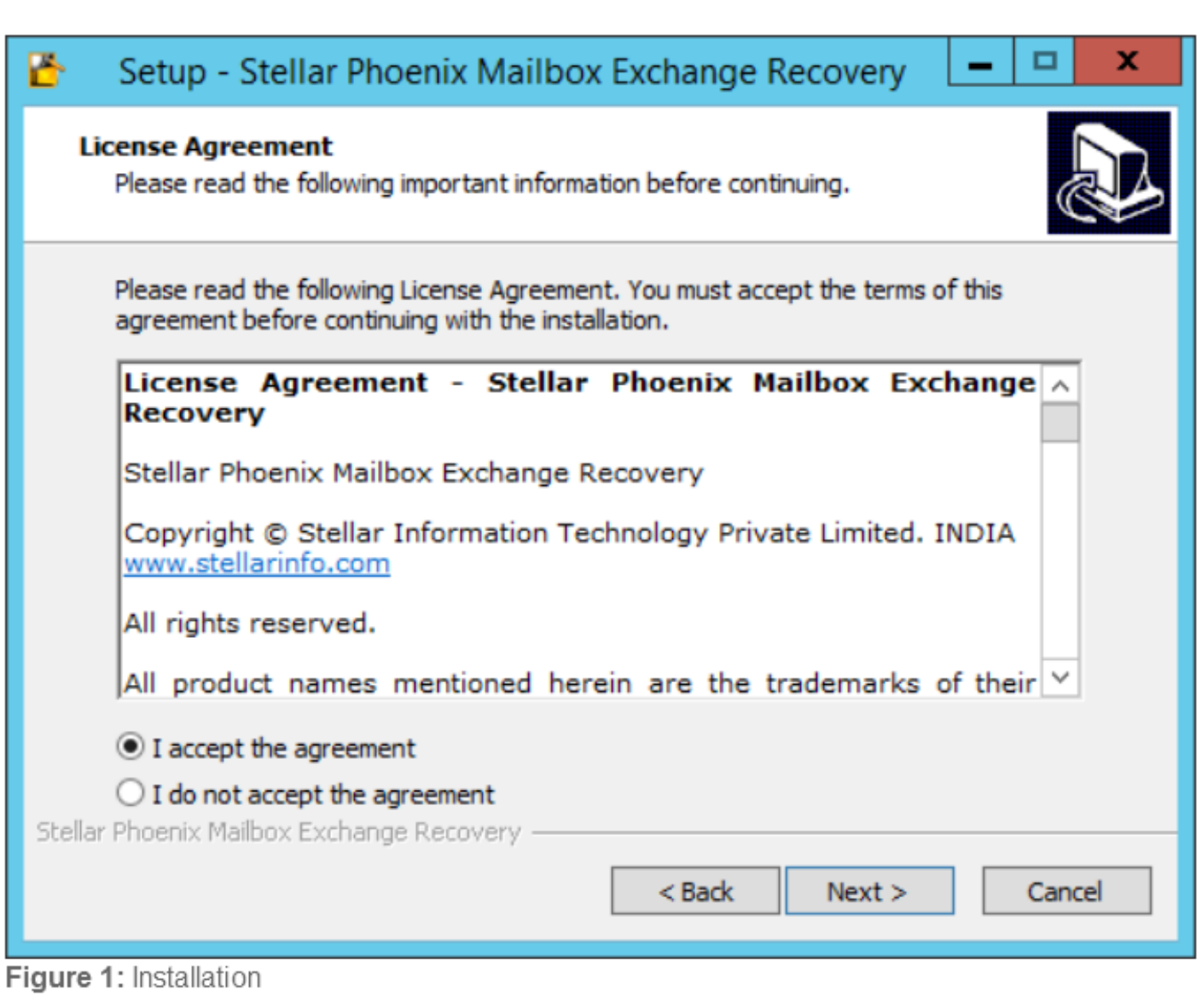
When you do need it there is a good chance you are in a bad situation and if you are reading this wondering how best to equip yourself, then it's worth saying that prevention is better than cure. A well designed and maintained Exchange environment, or a move to Exchange Online can help prevent being in such a desperate situation.

That said, a number of concurrent issues, such as failed backups, a link failure preventing DAG copies and disks filling up happen more than people expect and catch out those who think it would never happen to them.

Let's have a look at the tool in use starting with the basic installation and then testing it with a badly dismounted database as a simple test.

Using Exchange Recovery

Installation is straightforward using a standard Windows installation. You will need to install the tool on a workstation or server with access to the damaged database and a copy of Outlook or Office. For the purposes of this test we used a Windows 8.1 64-bit machine with the 32-bit version of Office 365 Click-To-Run installed.


Setup - Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery

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License Agreement – Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery

Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery

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● I accept the agreement
○ I do not accept the agreement

Figure 1: Installation

After the installation is complete, first launch of Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery results in a straightforward Office-ribbon style interface with a prompt to select the EDB file to open:

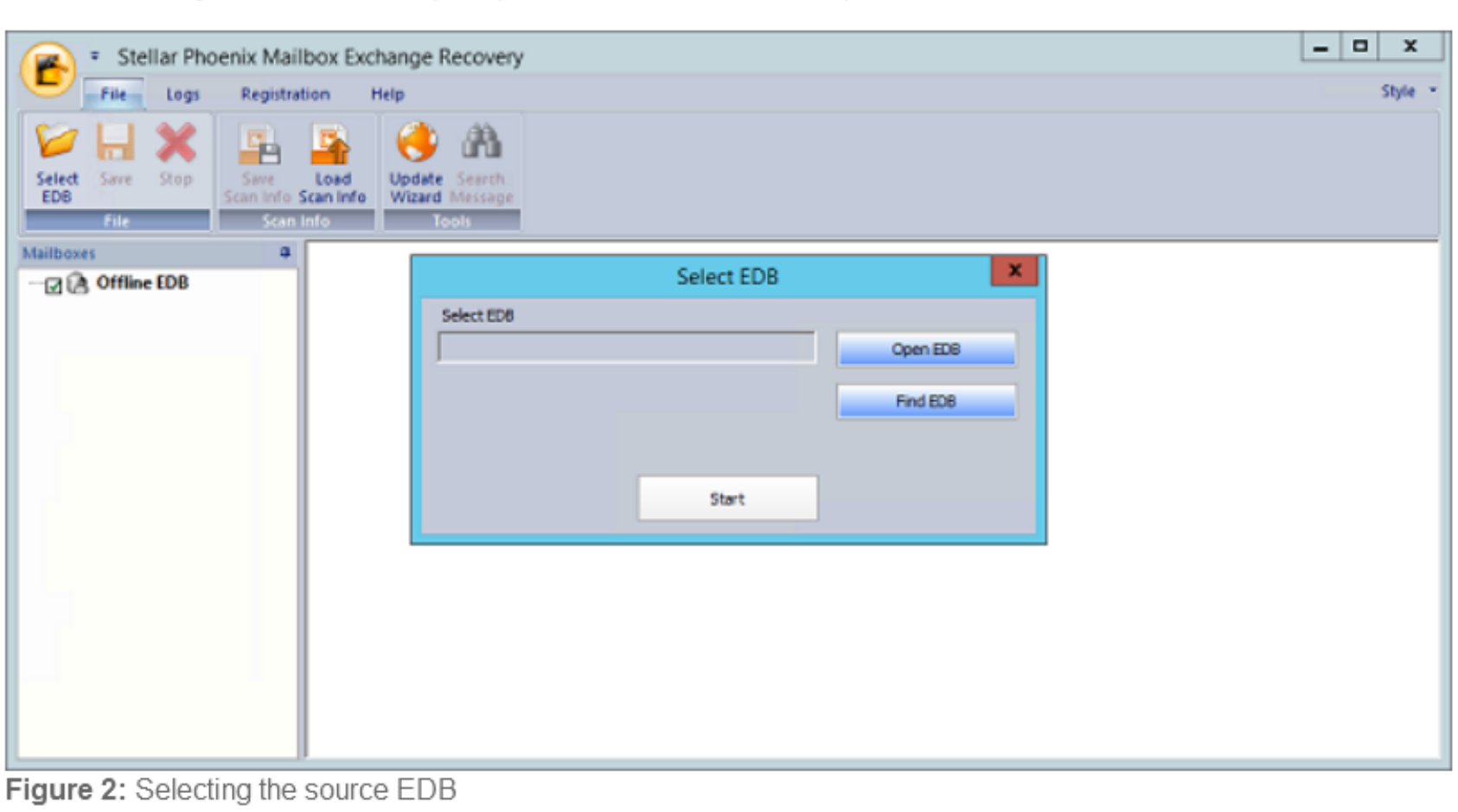
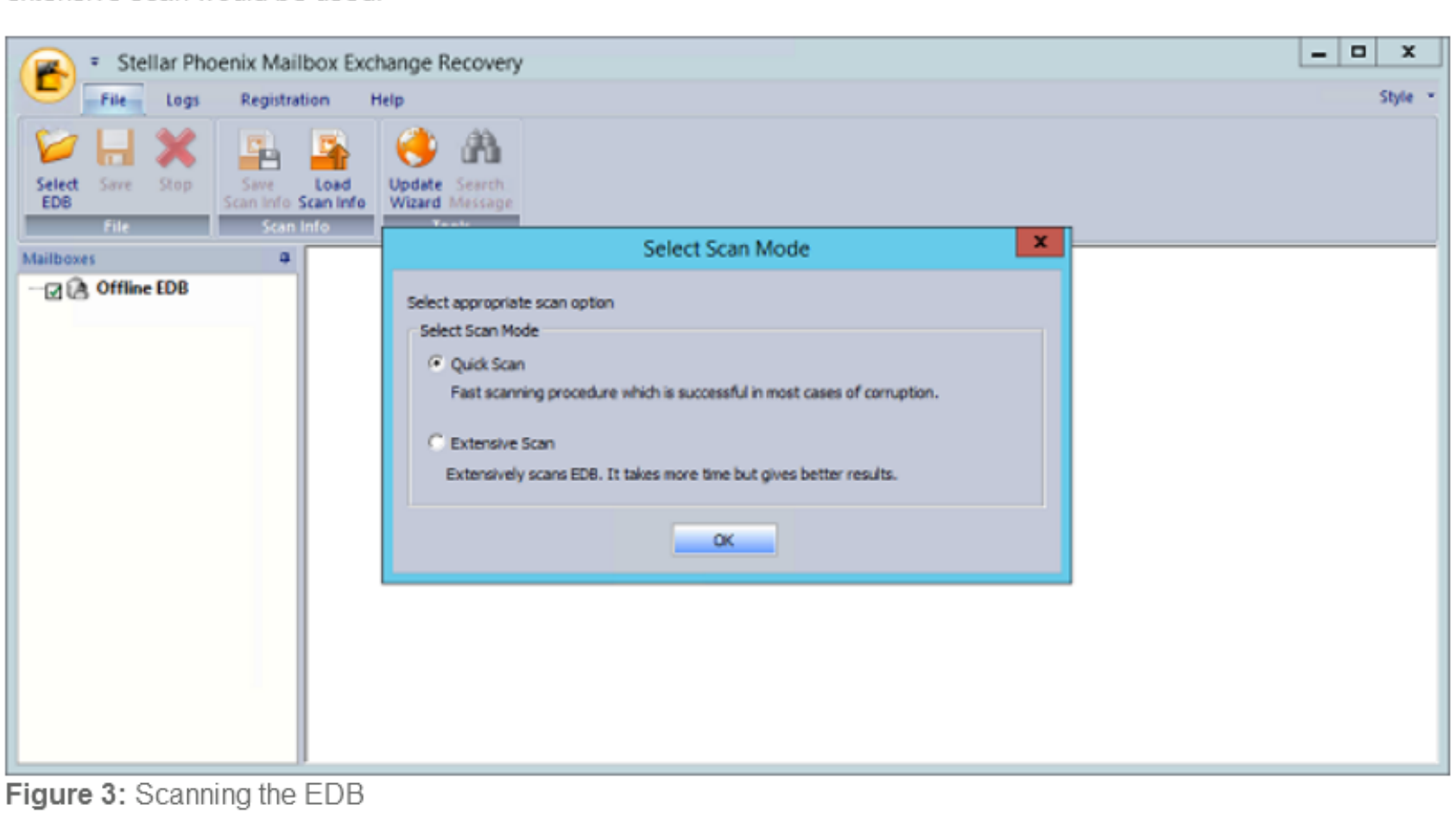


Figure 2: Selecting the source EDB

Next, the option is given to perform either a quick scan, suitable for most used of the tool, or the option to perform a full extensive scan. Typically the quick scan option would be used first, and if data still appears unrecoverable then the extensive scan would be used.


Select Scan Mode

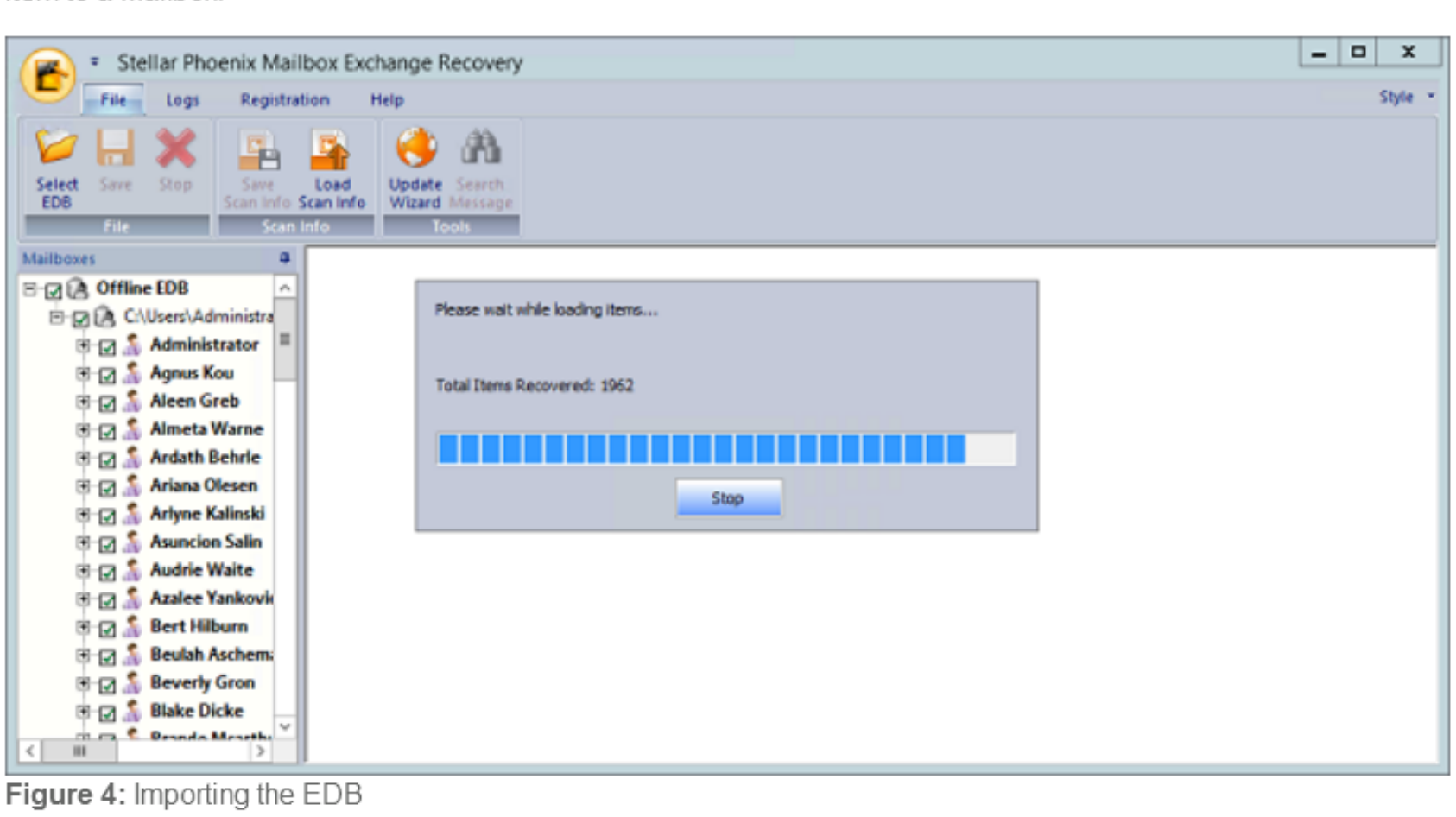
Select appropriate scan option

● Quick Scan
Fast scanning procedure which is successful in most cases of corruption.

○ Extensive Scan
Extensively scans EDB. It takes more time but gives better results.

Figure 3: Scanning the EDB

The scan process then opens the EDB file and attempts to identify all items stored within the database and then link each item to a Mailbox.


Please wait while loading items....

Total Items Recovered: 1962

Figure 4: Importing the EDB

After the scan process completes all mailboxes are listed in a tree-view, with the full structure or the mailbox (including recoverable items) available for viewing. Individual folders can then be selected and the messages within are listed. Selecting a message in the list view displays the content of the item in the right hand viewer-pane.

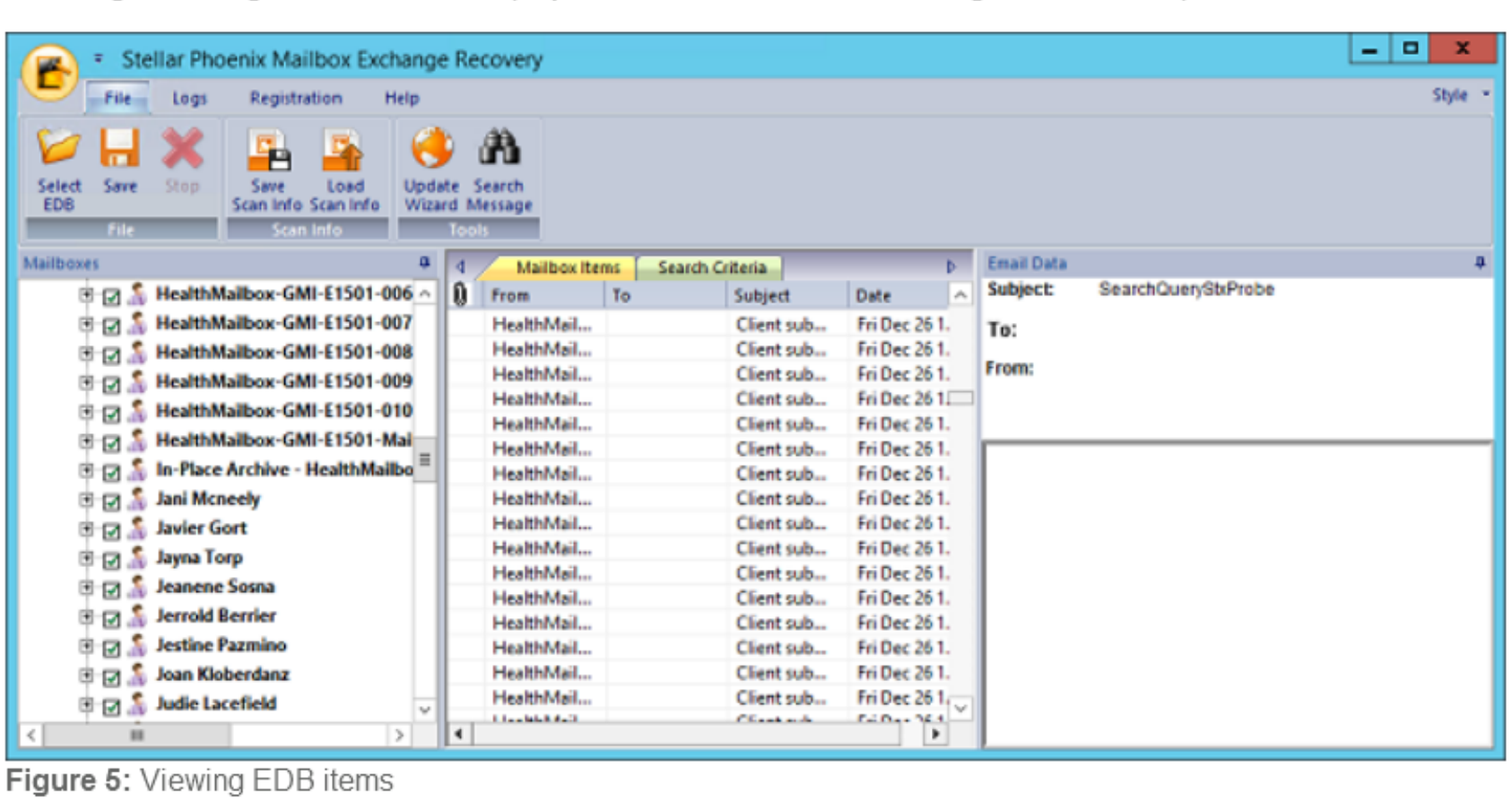


Figure 5: Viewing EDB items

After the items required are found, a number of options are available:

- Save as PST, which allows the ability to save a single mailbox to either a single, or split, PST file. This can then be opened in Outlook or importantly into Exchange.
- Save as MSG, EML, HTML, RTF or PDF allowing you to retrieve indictable messages as single files in a standard complaint format.
- Export to Exchange mailbox, particularly suited to dial-tone recovery situations where the users have access to an Exchange again using a blank database, and you want to fill the empty mailboxes with the existing messages.

This can be performed at any level with the structure, but for a typical single mailbox recovery simply highlight and right-click the display name of a mailbox, then choose the relevant option:

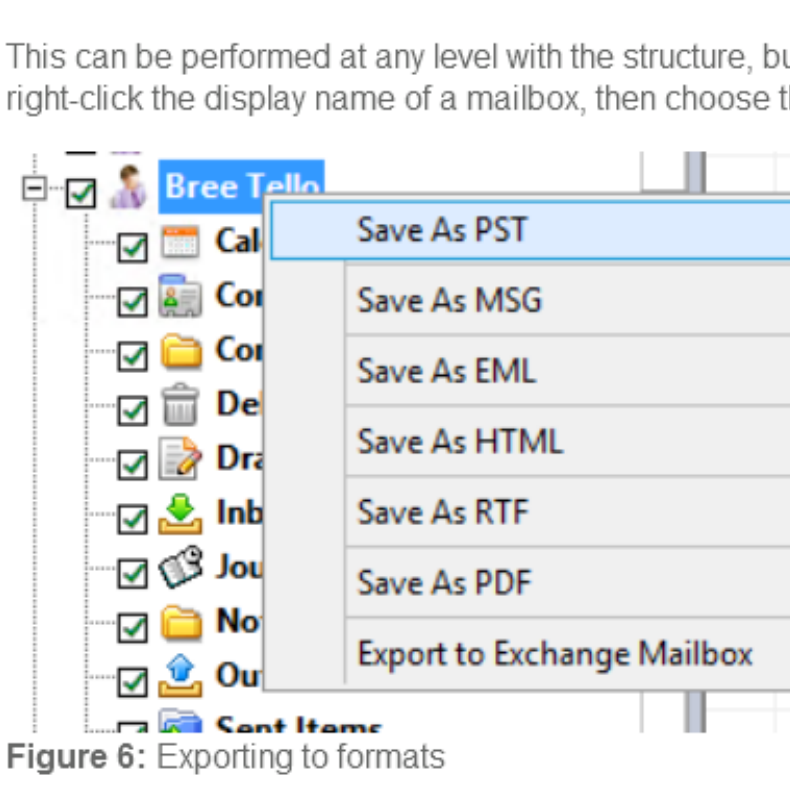
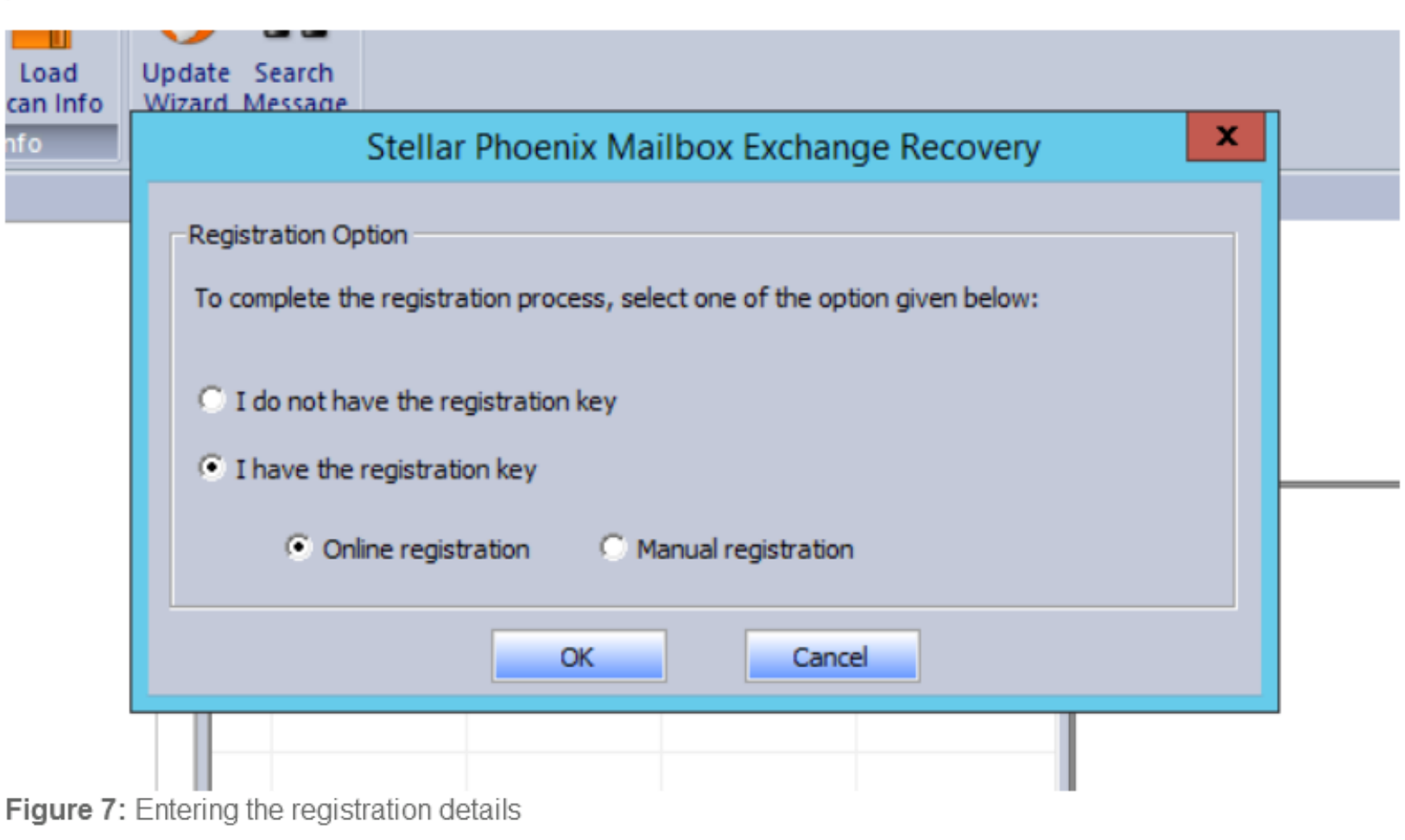


Figure 6: Exporting to formats

At this point we are prompted for the licence key. You'll notice that we've been able to get quite far in the recovery process – even down to viewing content before being prompted to enter this code. Stellar say this is intentional and the licence prompt is a single time only, and allows a potential purchaser to verify all data can be recovered if this is an emergency purchase.


Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery

Registration Option

To complete the registration process, select one of the option given below:

○ I do not have the registration key
● I have the registration key

● Online registration ○ Manual registration

Figure 7: Entering the registration details

Depending on the option selected the process to extract begins. For a file base export a folder is chosen to option contents to. This might be multiple PSTs, or the standard-based files. For an Exchange export the option is available to connect to a single user mailbox or many mailboxes:

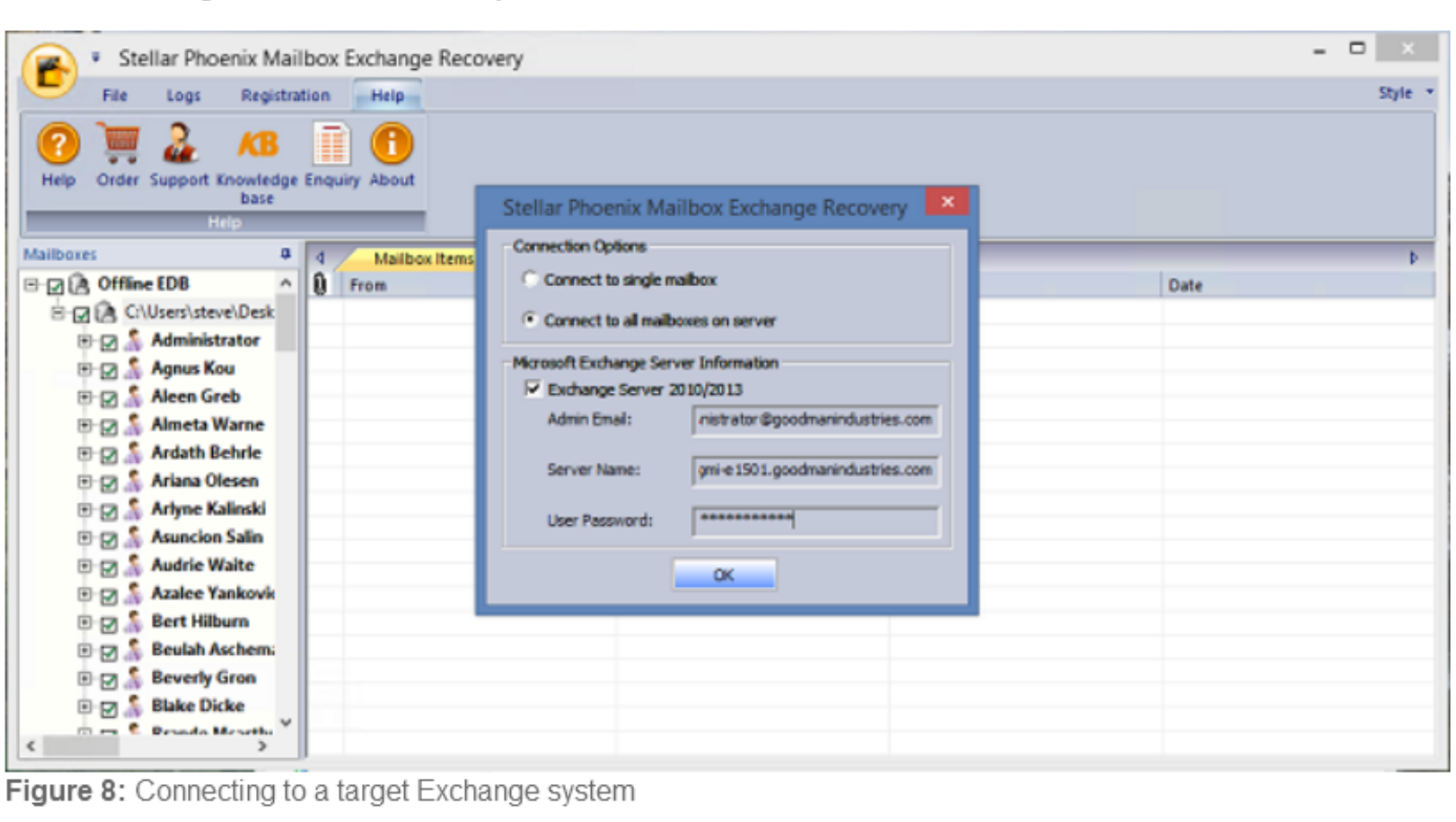


Figure 8: Connecting to a target Exchange system

Overall functionality

Those purchasing this product will have high expectations if they are attempting to use it in the event of a disaster. However it's overall performance will depend on the input data. Because it's attempting to recover damaged data then success will vary from scenario to scenario.

The most valuable functionality therefore was the ability to see the recoverable data with an unlicensed copy of the product before buying a licence key. One area that certainly wouldn't be clear to a worried admin in the event of a disaster is that there is a dependency on the Outlook client. It is only at the point of export – after entering the key – that this requirement is stated. It would be helpful if the utility warned the user first, as it could be a little bit anti-climactic to see a failure after initial success. That said, data was extracted successfully in our test scenario, which is what you really want.

Stellar Mailbox Extractor for Exchange Server

The Mailbox Extractor product fits another niche. Rather than extract data from corrupted or un mountable Exchange databases, Mailbox Extractor works with clean EDB files or connects directly to the Exchange environment.

There's a few great uses for this tool; firstly to accompany a database level backup tool. The tool can be used to extract mailboxes from a clean backup using a near-identical interface to the Exchange Recovery tool.

Secondly it can be used as a "Exmerge on steroids" tool to allow mass exports from the existing environment to PST or other formats, without bringing the environment offline. You could even potentially use it to export live data from one Exchange environment to another, similar to migration tools.

Using Mailbox Extractor for Exchange

After install, the interface is presented using the familiar ribbon style interface, and the user is presented with options to either open an Offline EDB file or connect to Online Exchange.

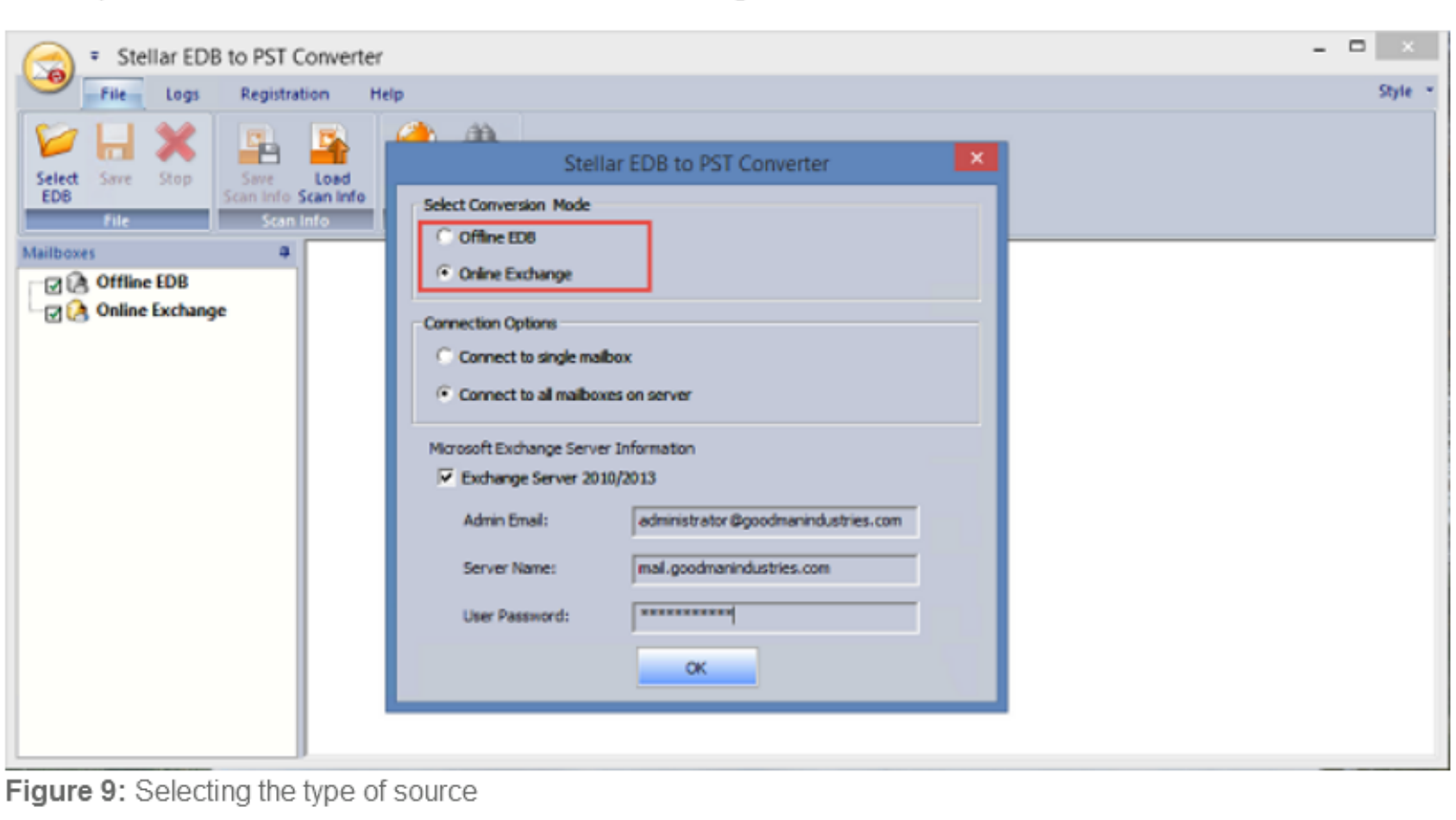


Figure 9: Selecting the type of source

Once the EDB file or connection to the online Exchange Database is open then the same interface is shown to the Exchange Recovery tool. As a quick recap, the interface allows viewing of the folder structure of each mailbox, the listing of items and viewing the content within each folder.

Again similar options are available for export – including PST, standards compliant formats and direct to an Exchange environment.

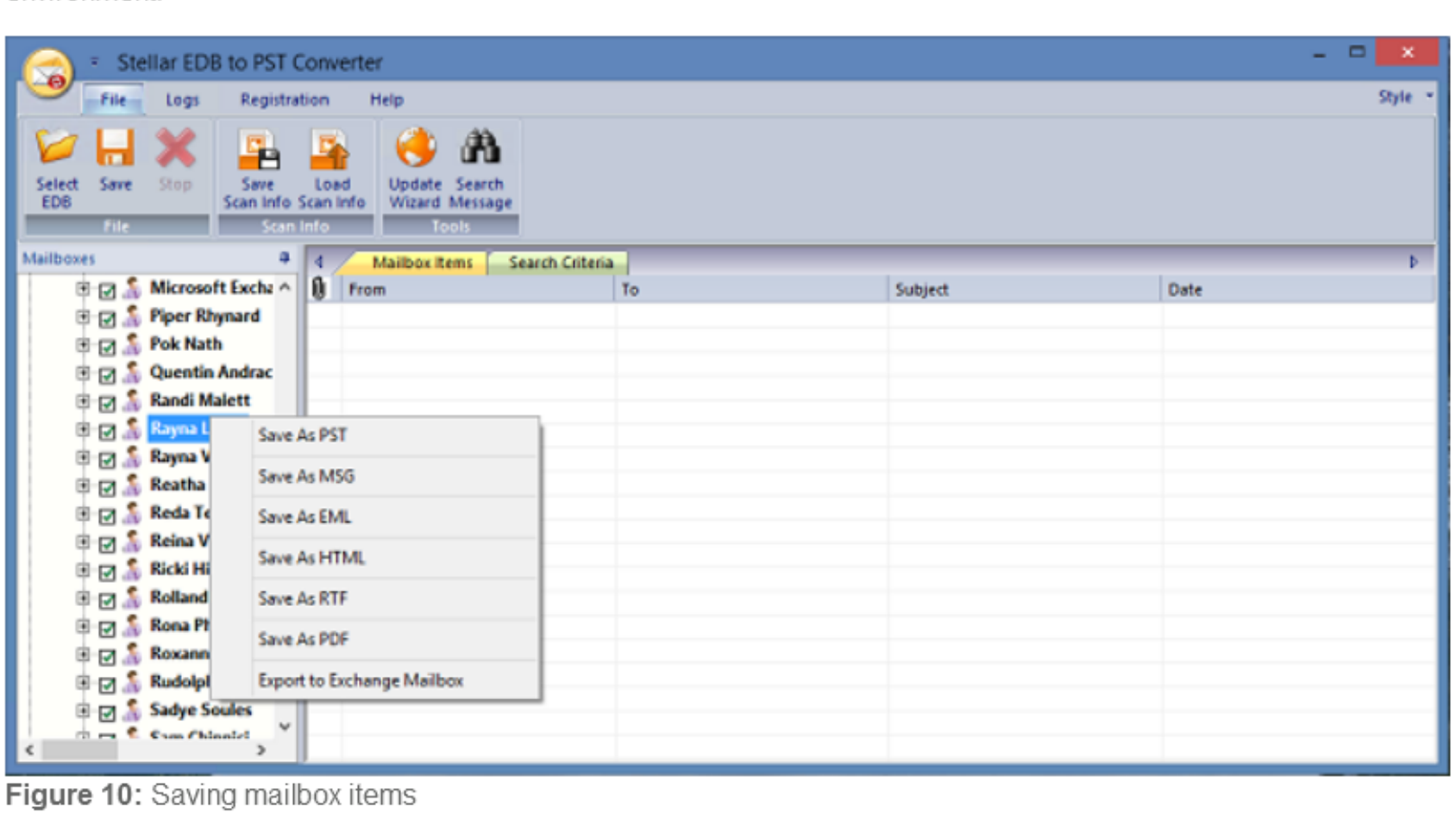


Figure 10: Saving mailbox items

Overall functionality

The tool definitely has features that improve upon what most backup tools offer when recovering data and provides valuable online export tools not available in the native products. There are tools that provide some of this functionality; where Mailbox Extractor excels is by providing a reasonably complete feature set within a single product.

Stellar OST to PST Converter

The third product in the Stellar toolkit that we're examining is aimed at a slightly different purpose – recovering information from Outlook's local offline data file, the OST file. The OST file is similar to Outlook's normal data file, the PST but is only used to store an encrypted copy of a remote Exchange mailbox.

A common forum request from those in need is to be able to recover such information, and you'll typically find Stellar eager to help those in such a predicament.

Using OST to PST Converter

You don't need to use the OST to PST Converter on the machine struggling to open the file. The file can be copied to an administrator's workstation with the tool installed. Equally though, with the appropriate licence the tool can be installed on multiple machines to work on and extract data directly from the user's workstation.

After launch, two options are presented; first to open an OST file from a known location, and the second option available is to scan the PC to find all OST files available:

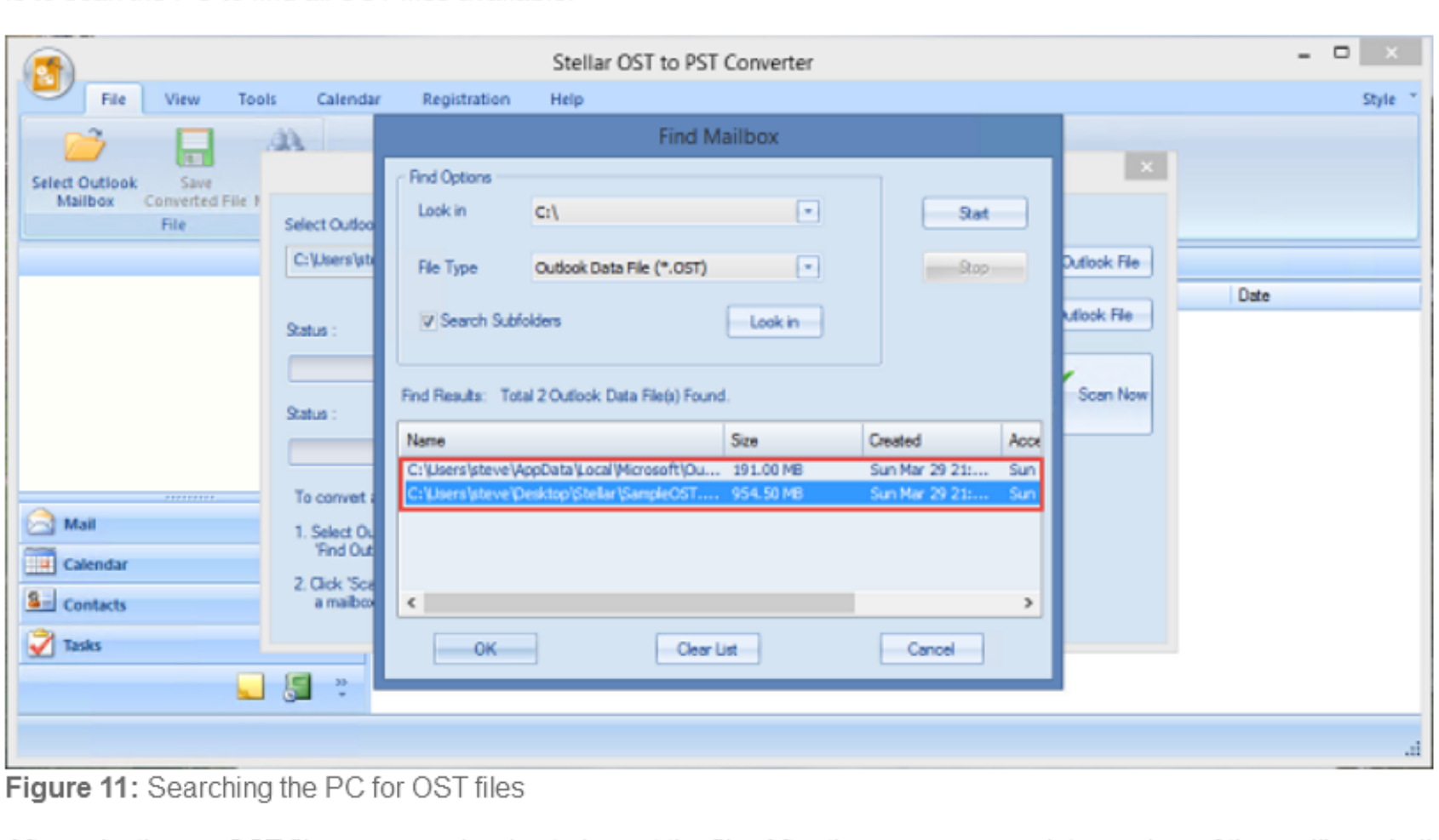

Stellar OST to PST Converter
Find Mailbox
Find Options
Look in
File Type Outlook Data File (*.OST)
Search Subfolders
Start
Stop

Figure 11: Searching the PC for OST files

After selecting an OST file a process begins to import the file. After the process completes a view of the mailbox similar to Outlook 2007 is shown, providing access to the folder structure and the ability to view messages, calendars, contacts, tasks and notes:

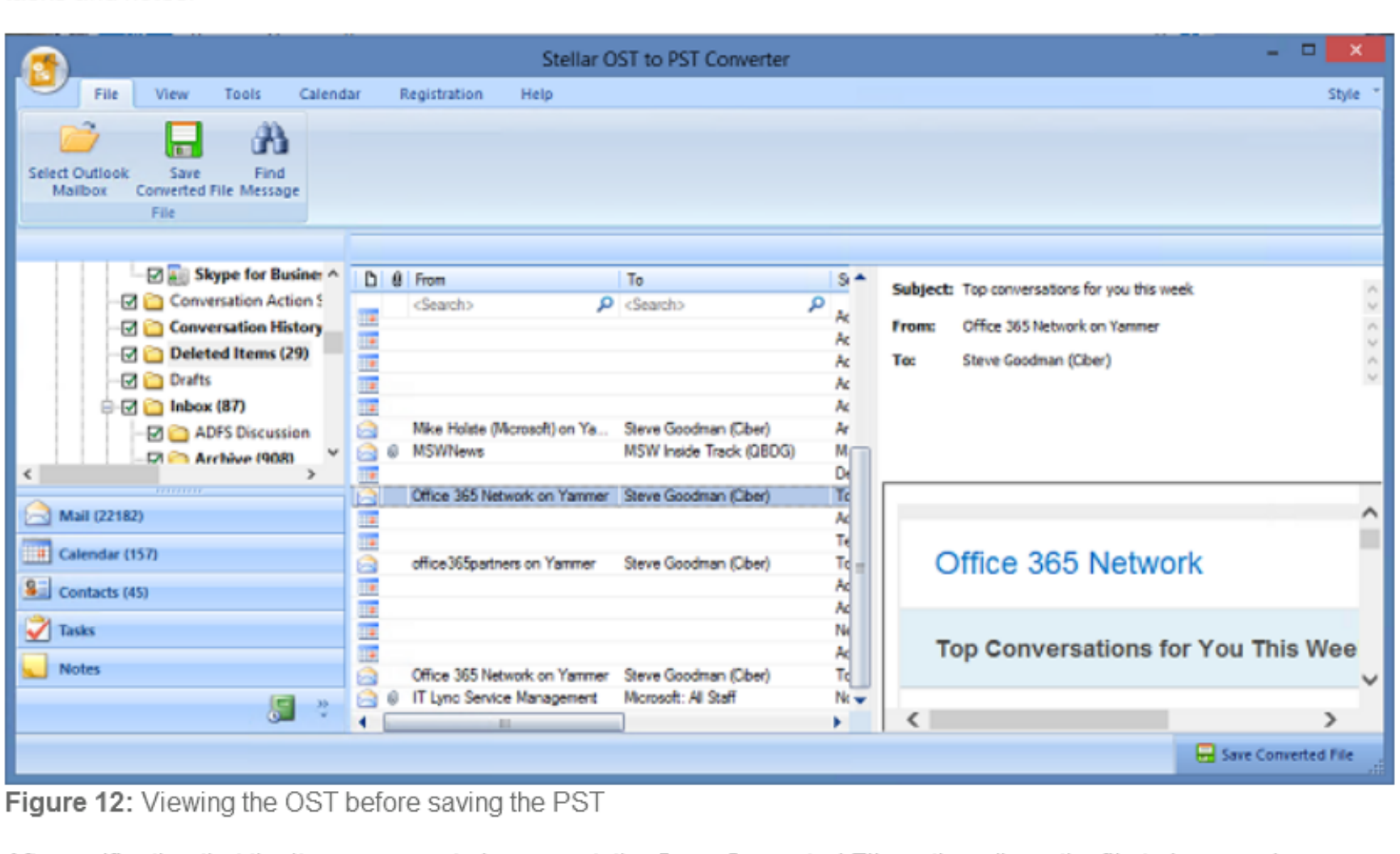


Figure 12: Viewing the OST before saving the PST

After verification that the items appear to be correct, the Save Converted File option allows the file to be saved as a new, freshly created PST file:

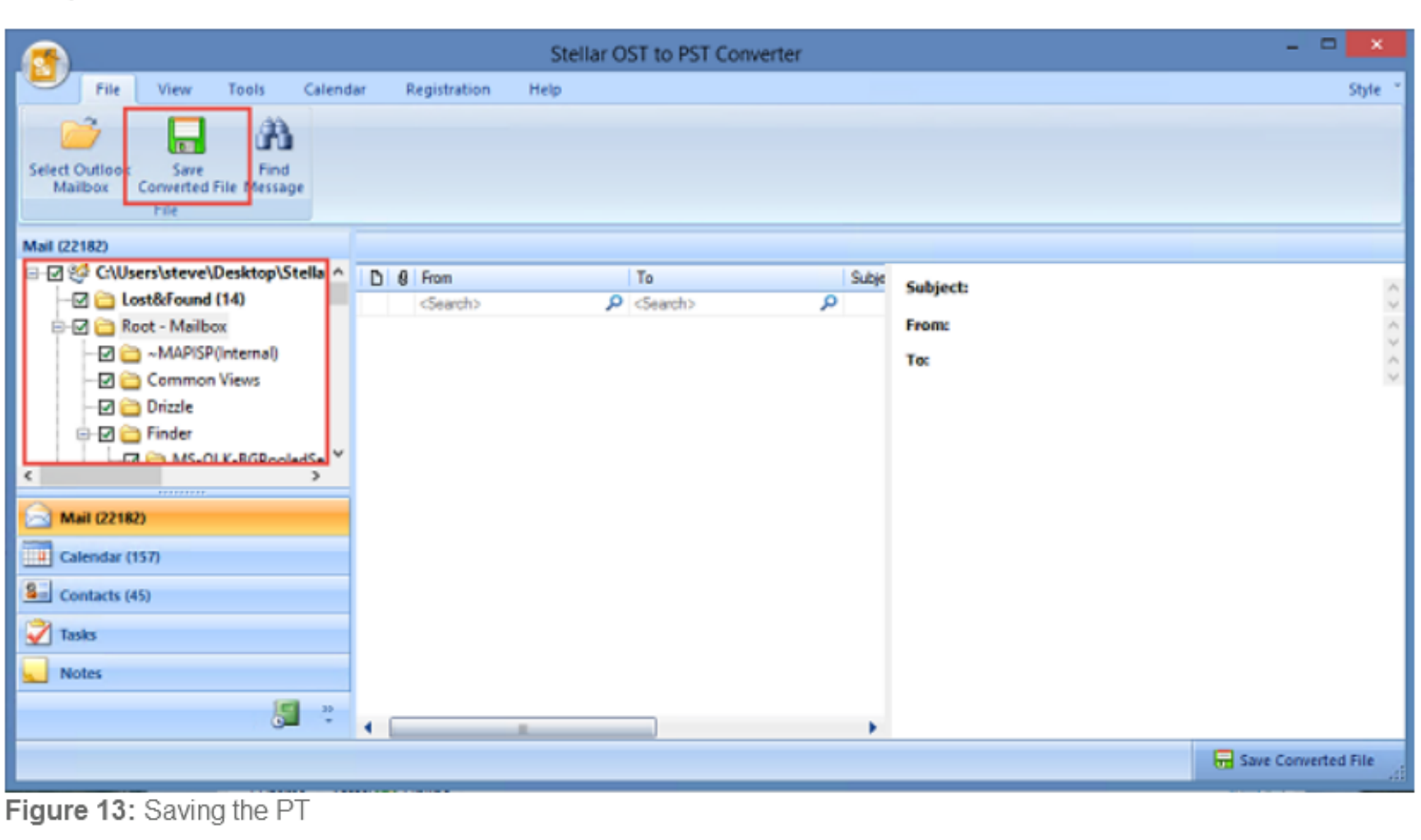


Figure 13: Saving the PT

Overall functionality

One wonders if the full UI is needed with a tool such as this – as Outlook comes with it's own viewer for data a first thought was whether just a batch-driven wizard to specify source and target files is all that is needed. That said, the full UI adds to the full functionality of the product and also opens up the possibilities of where it can be used, for example by security auditors to demonstrate how easily data can be taken from a machine. In our tests, the exported PST opened fine although some addition files, such as attachments were placed in the folder alongside the PST file.

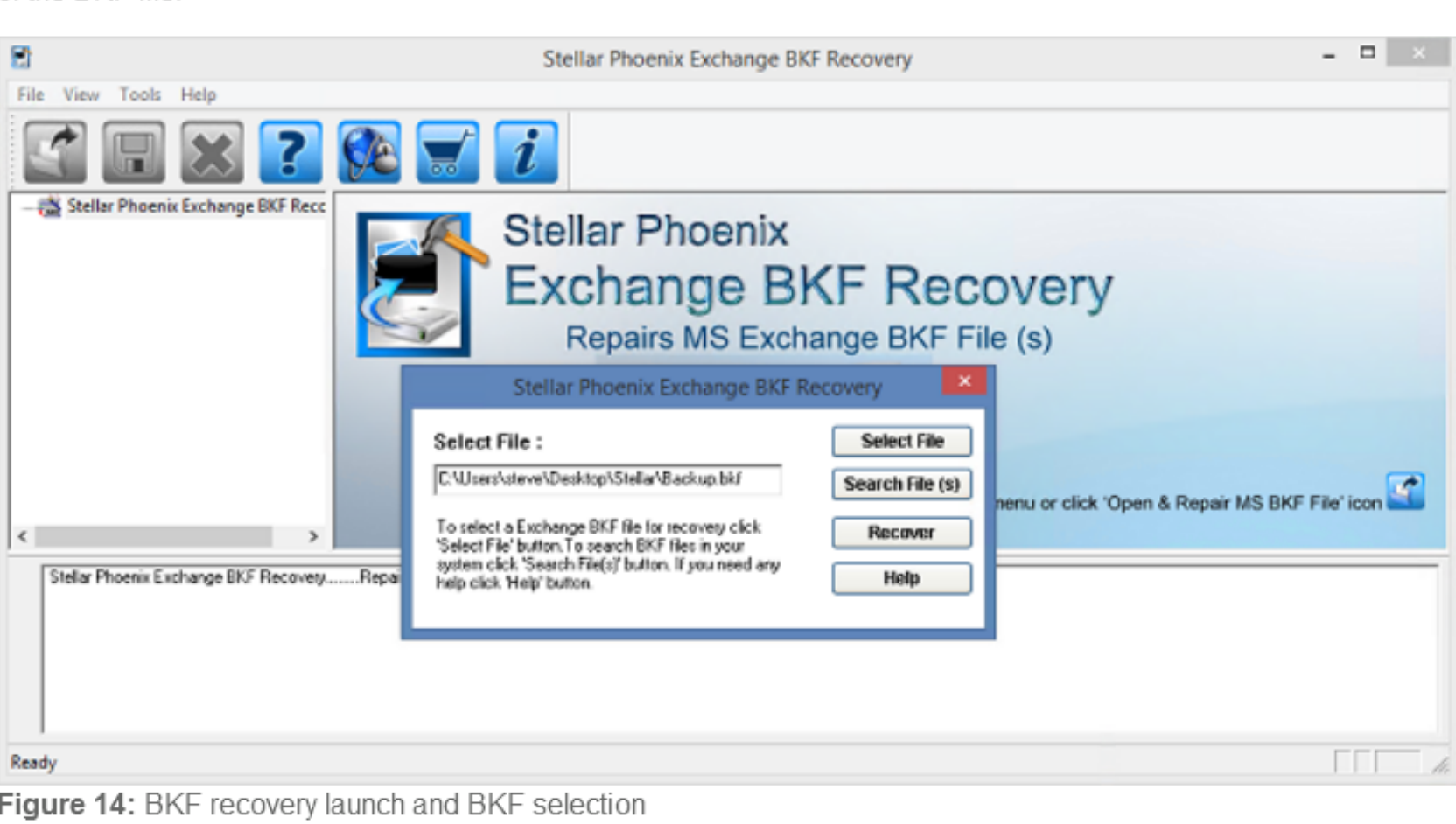
Stellar Exchange BKF Recovery

If your organization is still using NTBackup to protect Exchange server then recovering the files is not the only problem you face, as Windows 2003 R2 exits support this year. However if you have just completed a migration of all your legacy servers then you might struggle to restore BKF files, and even if you are still on Windows 2003 R2, then you'll be well aware that NTBackup files can sometimes fail to restore.

What this tool does is allow you to repair, and then extract Exchange EDB files directly from the BKF file. It's best used with the Mailbox Extractor for Exchange and with the BKF recovery tool provides a complete recovery solution.

Using Exchange BKF Recovery

Stellar's BKF recovery tool feels from a slightly older generation to the other products reviewed here. This is understandable as really this fits a legacy void that many organizations will not face. Using the tool is straightforward; as with the other tools covered in the review, launching the tool brings up the main UI and a window prompting for the location of the BKF file:


Stellar Phoenix Exchange BKF Recovery
Repairs MS Exchange BKF File (s)

Select File :
C:\Users\steve\Desktop\Stellar\Backup.bkf

To select a Exchange BKF file to recovery click 'Select File' button.To search BKF files in your system click 'Search File' button.If you need any help click 'Help' button.

Figure 14: BKF recovery launch and BKF selection

After the BKF file has been repaired, the NTBackup set is shown including both log files and the EDB file. The files can then be saved in their native format and either used as part of a recovery, crucially with the correct version of Exchange, or via the aforementioned tools.

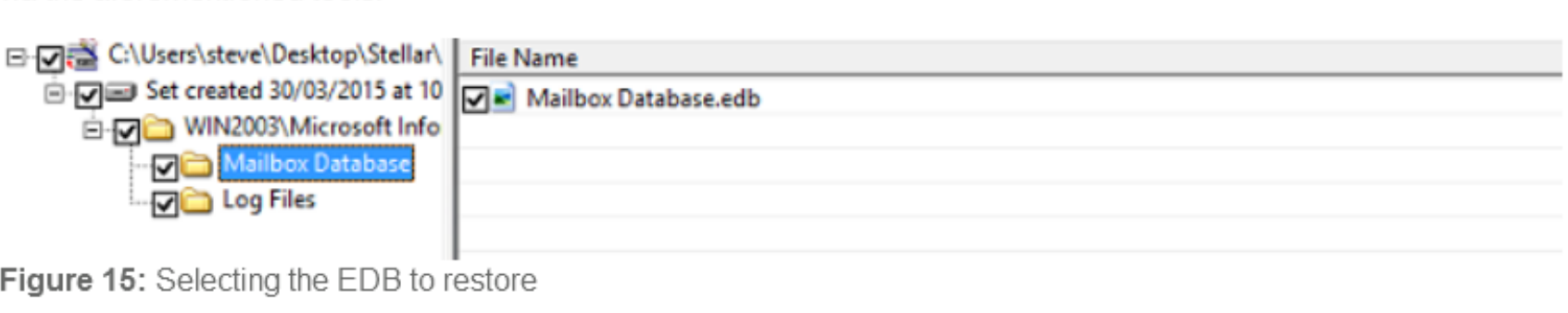


Figure 15: Selecting the EDB to restore

Overall functionality

This product is rather simple compared to the others. As mentioned, the UI is not in line with the other products and this stands out. It's simple functionality for a smaller set of customers does explain this. The software managed to restore our test BKF file from Windows 2003 R2 with Exchange 2007 with no issue.

Support

Stellar support spent time with us to help us understand the product from the outset of the review. They were very engaged, and plugged into what their customers need. The tools worked correctly, so no further support was needed, but the initial support far exceeded expectations.

How it compares to the competition

There isn't any direct competitors from a single vendor offering all the same functionality or break-out into different areas. This alone sets it apart. The market is very varied though, with some products that compete with the Mailbox Extractor, such as Veeam's offering being made available for free and Kroll Ontrack's PowerControls for Exchange positioning as a migration tool rather than recovery tool.

Final thoughts

This is a good suite of products that works correctly and is easy and, in general, intuitive to use. The suite could do with a little polish to meet modern expectations, but in the event of them being needed the UI does not prevent the product from working well. I give this suite a rating of 4.3 which works out to a MSExchange.org Silver Award.

MSExchange.org Rating 4.3/5

MSExchange.org Silver Award ★★★

Learn more about Stellar Mailbox Exchange Toolkit.

See Also

- Stellar Mailbox Exchange Toolkit
- Stellar Mailbox Extractor for Exchange Server
- Stellar Phoenix Compact PST
- Stellar GroupWise to Exchange Migrator
- Stellar Phoenix EDB Recovery Software
- Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery
- Stellar Phoenix Mailbox Exchange Recovery
- Stellar Phoenix Outlook PST Repair
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The Author — Steve Goodman

Steve Goodman is an Exchange MVP and works as a Technical Architect for one of the UK's leading Microsoft Gold partners.

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- Product Review: QUADROtech ArchiveShuttle on 27 April 2015
- Using the Hybrid Configuration Wizard in Exchange Server 2013 (Part 4) on 7 April 2015
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